

Washington, DC (March 29, 2011) –Rep. Gus Bilirakis (FL-09) today introduced the Student Visa Security Improvement Act, which will improve the background checks conducted on student visa applicants from high-risk areas and enhance America's ability to ensure that foreign students are abiding by the terms of their visas once in the U.S.

"Many foreign students come here with noble intentions, and while not all terrorists have come to the U.S. under the guise of a student visa, many do," said Bilirakis, a member of the House Homeland Security Committee. "Terrorists have found a loop hole in our nation's security, and we must close that loop hole."

Just last month, authorities arrested Khalid Ali-M Aldawsari, a 20-year-old Saudi national studying in the U.S. on a student visa, for plotting terrorist attacks against soldiers, critical infrastructure, and President George W. Bush. Recent stories have exposed schools that have helped individuals fraudulently obtain student visas, or failed to report students that did not attend class. Several 9/11 terrorists overstayed their student visas and the Times Square bomber, Faisal Shahzad, reportedly first entered the U.S. on a student visa.

"These recent abuses of the system show that we don't have a proper screening system to adequately vet students before being admitted to study in the U.S.," Bilirakis said. "My legislation would require ICE agents at visa stations overseas to review all student visa applications and conduct in-person interviews when deemed necessary before a student is granted his or her visa."

In addition to enhanced screening overseas, the bill calls for more vigilant monitoring of foreign students once they are in the country by ensuring they are active participants in the programs in which they are enrolled and are in fact working toward an education.

It would require academic institutions to report if a foreign student quit attending classes. The Department of Homeland Security would also be granted the authority to decertify a school's visa program if it is caught defrauding the student visa process.

At the end of 2010, there were more than 800,000 students in the U.S. that are participating in

the Student and Exchange Visitor Program.

Bilirakis first introduced legislation to strengthen the student visa process in 2007. That year, a University of South Florida student was arrested for carrying explosives and charged with trying to help terrorists. The student, Ahmed Mohamed, was in the country with a nonimmigrant student visa. In 2008, he was sentenced to 15 years in federal prison.

In 2009, the House passed the Department of Homeland Security Act, which included an amendment sponsored by Bilirakis to expand the Visa Security Program. Bilirakis introduced the Student Visa Security Improvement Act again in May 2010.

The 9/11 Commission wrote in its final report that "had the immigration system set a higher bar for determining whether individuals are who or what they claim to be . . . it could have potentially excluded, removed, or come into contact with several hijackers who did not appear to meet the terms for admitting short-term visitors."

### **Key Provisions of the Student Visa Security Improvement Act (H.R. 1211):**

- Require ICE agents at visa stations overseas to review student visa applications and conduct in-person interviews when deemed necessary before a student is granted his or her visa;
- Increase the frequency in which a student in the U.S. is required to check in to ensure that he or she is actually participating in the school program;
- Require the school to report if a foreign student quit attending classes;
- Authorize DHS to decertify a school's visa program if it's caught defrauding the student visa process